

# North Carolina Minority Health Facts



# Hispanics/ Latinos

State Center for Health Statistics and Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities

December 2006

This report presents basic health facts about Hispanics/Latinos in North Carolina in the areas of mortality, chronic diseases, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, health risk factors, access to health care, quality of life, maternal and infant health, and child and adolescent health. But first we present some background information on the Hispanic/Latino population in the state.

## What is in a Name? – Origin of the Terms Hispanic and Latino

**Hispanics or Latinos** (in this report Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably) are those people who classified themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 questionnaire – Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban – as well as those who indicate that they are other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino. The term Hispanic was used formally for the first time by the United States in the 1980 census. “Hispanic” and “Latino” have been used to suggest ethnic or cultural homogeneity among people of Latin American heritage; they do not refer to racial background. While many Hispanic Americans may experience group affinity due to language, historical experiences, cultural values, and socioeconomic status, the group is in fact very diverse and may identify themselves more by national origin or birthplace.

The term Hispanic is derived from the Latin word “Hispania,” which means Spain, and is used to refer to people who trace their cultural origins to Spain and the Latin American countries colonized by Spain, with no Indian ancestry. The term may also describe those for whom Spanish is their native language. Some view this term as a positive descriptor, especially in the media. Others regard the term “Hispanic” as Eurocentric, connoting colonialism and disregarding the influences of the

indigenous cultures of the Americas. The term “Hispanic” is more commonly used in the eastern United States, Florida, and Texas.

The term Latino or Latina (female) is used to refer to people originating from, or having a heritage related to, Latin America, which is made up of many countries encompassed by Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. This term is widely preferred in California. Latin Americans are distinguished by their diversity and their native tongue may be Spanish, Portuguese, and/or French, depending on whether the country was colonized by Spain, Portugal, or France. However, the term is not appropriate for the millions of Native Americans who inhabit Latin America.

For those who have cultural roots outside of the United States and were either born or raised in the United States, there may be an affinity to two cultures and some people may not be fully integrated into either one. Terms may be created from within the population to define a new identity made up of a mix of two cultural worlds. It is best to ask people which term they prefer to be called by.

In North Carolina, the terms are often used together – “Hispanic/Latino” – so as to be all-encompassing when referring to the population. In the 2000 Census, the term “Hispanic” was changed to “Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino” and defined as follows: “A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.”

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the 2004 Hispanic/Latino population of North Carolina at 517,617 or just over 6 percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> The Hispanic population of North Carolina has more than quadrupled since 1990.